

**Testimony by Ambassador Mark Palmer
Committee on International Relations May 5, 2005**

The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history because dictators made it so. An estimated 169 million people died at the hands of their own leaders -- Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein – an estimated three times the also historic record number of combatants killed in the wars started by these same men. The 21st century could be even bloodier and filled with wars as the world's remaining dictators have or are seeking to gain weapons of mass destruction and foster or actively support terrorists themselves intent upon massive destruction. Both dictators and terrorists need internal and external “enemies” and the use of force to sustain their power.

An entirely different scenario is possible for this century. Roughly half of the world's dictators have been removed from power over the past four decades, almost always without a shot being fired, and democracy is on the advance. While history seldom moves in one direction, and we are sobered by Putin's Russia crossing back across the line from Partly Free to Not Free in 2004, there is reason for hope if we and other democracies place support for oppressed democrats inside the remaining dictatorships at the center of national security policy and our diplomacy.

The ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2005, with which I have been associated since its inception, makes the pursuit of democracy a more systematic and permanent part of our diplomacy. It recognizes that our primary allies are not the dictators but the people who want the right to elect their own leaders and to remove them from power, to form independent trade unions to fight for better wages and therefore also fairer trade, to read and watch honest newspapers and television stations, to worship freely, to have recourse to courts which base their decisions on the rule of law and not the interests of the dictator, to accept the “radical” notion that women are people too. It affirms that we should study and learn from the successes of people's power movements in peacefully removing their illegitimate leaders, and particularly what our diplomats and non-governmental organizations can do to help.

Specifically, the Act provides for clear and continuing leadership within the U.S. Government. It codifies the position of Under Secretary for Global Affairs and specifies that the incumbent bears primary responsibility for democracy promotion – Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky is the first incumbent who has made democracy her highest priority and it should not be left to fate and individual inclination in the future. The Democracy, Human Rights and Labor bureau is substantially strengthened, including by the establishment of the Office of Democratic Movements and Transitions, the first locus within the United States Government for accumulating the experience of past transitions and systematically applying them in the remaining non-democratic countries. There has long been a tension between the geographic bureaus of the State Department, traditionally the power bureaus, and the functional

bureaus. For those of us who care about democracy and human rights, it is critical to strengthen the hand of those who fight daily battles for these rights within the system. I am frequently approached by young Iranians, Libyans, Belarussians, Chinese and others in people power movements asking who they can approach in the U.S Government for advice and support. Their experience with the relevant regional bureau's country desk officers is mixed – sometimes quite wonderful but all too often they are met with suspicion or lack of understanding and expertise. There has been no office anywhere in the U.S. Government which can serve as a knowledgeable interlocutor and partner. The Act also provides Regional Democracy Hubs in each region where there is a democracy deficit.

The Act requires action plans for each non-democratic state to guide our diplomacy. These plans would begin with our embassies asking local democrats what their strategy is and how we can help them achieve it. Often we find that our embassies and diplomacy are merely reactive – allowing the dictator to manipulate his own people and us, for example by regularly arresting people and then releasing them as a supposed sign of liberalization and response to us, even asking for policy rewards, only to have the same people or others arrested shortly thereafter. As each country situation has its own specific features, our plans need to be well-grounded in reality, but they also need to be creative and benefit from successful experiences elsewhere. Conventional diplomacy is fine under conventional circumstances, but often in non-democratic countries unconventional diplomacy is called for and works.

In his letter to Congressman Wolf supporting this Act, Natan Sharansky recalls “my own years as a dissident and how the foreign diplomats in Moscow, though personally empathetic nevertheless acted ambivalently. They were not sure that their governments would want to risk offending the host country. Your bill is exceedingly important because it assures US diplomats that their country supports their natural inclination to encourage freedom and democracy.” I was one of those diplomats in Moscow in the late 1960s and was directly responsible for dealing with dissidents, Jews, actors, writers and others the Communist Party oppressed. I vividly recall my own uncertainty about whether I could admit to my superiors that I was smuggling out dissident literature, so-called samizdat through the diplomatic pouch. As the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in charge of our relations with the Soviet Union under President Reagan, I worked assiduously with his wife Avital to secure Natan's release from his twelve years in prison and stood with her to greet him as he was released in Germany. That was one of the proudest moments of my diplomatic service. Natan is absolutely right that many of our diplomats have a “natural inclination to encourage freedom and democracy”. I know of dozens of cases in which Foreign Service Officers, particularly the younger ones, have risked their lives and their careers to help democrats. This Act will help ensure that they have the confidence they are doing the agreed thing and that they will be rewarded not punished for their initiative.

It is wonderful that this Act establishes a Congressional Democracy Award for U.S. Government employees who have made extraordinary efforts to promote

democracy. Nothing could more encourage our people on the front line. Congressmen and Congresswomen always have been in the lead within the U.S. Government on human rights and democracy, way out ahead of the traditionally cautious State Department and even the White House. My savvy colleagues in the Foreign Service knew and know that they must turn to you for support when the “system” simply is too passive.

The Act also provides for training career Foreign Service Officers and Chiefs of Mission in practical methods which have worked in helping local democratic forces, people power movements and non-democratic regimes make peaceful transitions. There are no State Department manuals or other organized materials or courses in this field. The case histories of work by Ambassador Harry Barnes in Chile helping to bring down Pinochet, or Ambassador Smith Hempstone almost succeeding in uniting Kenyans to replace Moi, or most recently the splendid work of the U.S. Embassy in Kiev together with such perhaps surprising democratic allies as the French and Japanese embassies there need to be made systematically available. Again I recall that when I went out to Budapest to take up my post as ambassador in 1986, no one gave me any advice on how to promote democracy in that then communist state. It is still true today that Chiefs of Mission going to non-democratic nations generally are unaware of past precedents and their own potential. They do not understand that they are proxy voices for a people without their own elected leaders.

The Act recognizes the importance of the world’s democracies working together. It underlines the central importance of the Community of Democracies, of the Caucus of Democracies within the United Nations, of practical alliances of democracies in every institution and region. The democracies produce 89% of the world’s GNP, we are overwhelmingly the most powerful militarily and in democracy we have by far the most magnetic political values and system. But we all too often have not worked together; when we do as most recently demonstrated in Lebanon, nothing can stop us. Now we need the political will to find agreed political strategies to promote democracy in places like Iran, North Korea, Cuba and China. We also need operational institutions with staffs and resources.

In that regard, the Act provides financial support for the Democracy Transition Center, which is being established by a growing list of participating states in the Community of Democracies under Hungarian leadership. The United Nations and the United States are supporting this multinational initiative. It is striking that there are numerous multinational bodies like the World Bank and the IMF responsible for economic development and quite intrusive in insisting upon modern free market economic strategies and programs. There are no multinational equivalent institutions for political development, insisting upon and guiding transitions from dictatorship to democracy. The closest is the United Nations Development Program, which has done remarkable work promoting democracy under the leadership of Mark Malloch Brown, for example through its Arab Human Development Reports. But even the UNDP’s leadership told me that they face inherent limits, for example an inability to describe a member nation of the United Nations as a “dictatorship”. So they too

support the establishment of the Democracy Transition Center as a partner with which they can work.

The Act provides for a substantial increase in the State Department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund. USAID is not present in many of the world's non-democratic states – the State Department and this Fund have been innovative and fast-moving in certain situations. The Act establishes an internet site for global democracy, which would carry key democratic documents including translations into local languages of the relevant portions of the annual State Department reports on human rights.

A bipartisan Democracy Promotion Advisory Board is established to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of State, including a study of democracy assistance. The tax payers are spending substantial sums for democracy assistance and no systematic, independent review has taken place since we first launched into this field in a major way in the early 1980s. We need to know whether our priorities are right. And for the Secretary of State and the President on an ongoing basis to have independent views and expertise about the never-simple challenges of helping to bring democracy to non-democratic countries can be of real value. Too often government insiders are consumed with fire drills and crises, are unable to look ahead and develop fresh ideas and programs. This new board will provide that dimension.

These are some of the highlights of this Act. It was drafted over a period of a year in close consultation with experienced diplomats and democracy promoters from inside and outside government. I am pleased that it has the support of groups across the spectrum. I particularly want to note that the Committee on the Present Danger, itself broadly bipartisan, has issued a strong statement of support.

I urge that you give the Act careful consideration and hope that you will support it. I wish to commend the outstanding leadership of Congressmen Wolf and Lantos in initiating and promoting this legislation along with many of their colleagues in the House and Senate.